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ABSTRACT

Although research suggest a general preference by men for attractive partners, attractiveness may be more important for some men than for others. This study was conducted to investigate the role of men's sex stereotypic attitudes on their dating preferences. It was hypothesized that the level of sex stereotyping would correlate with the level ratings of ideal physical attractiveness of dating partners, such that highly sex stereotyped males would rate their ideal dating partners as more attractive than would those men low in sex stereotyping. It was further hypothesized that level of sex stereotyping would positively correlate with level of ideal dating partner femininity ratings, such that ideal dating partners of sex stereotyped participants would be rated higher on femininity than would ideal partners of low sex stereotyped males. Finally, it was hypothesized that sex stereotyping would also correlate negatively with masculinity. Male undergraduates (N=101) rated themselves on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and rated their ideal dating partner on physical attractiveness, femininity, and masculinity. The results indicated that highly sex stereotyped men were more likely to prefer physically attractive ideal dating partners who were low in masculinity. No relationship was found for femininity. (NB)

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DATING PREFERENCES IN SEX STEREOTYPIC MEN

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RUNNING HEAD: Dating Preferences

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of men's sex stereotypic attitudes on their dating preferences. It was hypothesized that more sex stereotypic men would prefer physically attractive, feminine partners, who are also low in masculinity. One hundred and one male undergraduates were asked to rate themselves on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and to rate their ideal dating partner on physical attractiveness, femininity, and masculinity. Results indicate that highly sex stereotyped men were more likely to prefer physically attractive ideal dating partners who were low in masculinity. No relationship was found for femininity.

DATING PREFERENCES IN SEX STEREOTYPIC MEN

In spite of societal changes, it appears that gender stereotypic attitudes continue to be pervasive. Studies such as McBroom (1987) and Werner and LaRussa (1985) have found shifts toward egalitarianism. On the other hand, Ruble (1983) found no change, and Helmreich, Spence, and Gibson (1982) found shifts in the early 1970s, but no change from 1976 to 1980. Lewin and Tragos (1987) found that sex stereotyping in high school students had not changed much since 1956.

Preference for Attractive Partners

An important variable in many studies of dating partners has been the level of physical attractiveness of the partner (e.g. Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986). Research has found that attractive persons are overwhelmingly preferred to unattractive partners (see Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986, for review). And, men place greater importance on physical attractiveness in mates than do women (see Feingold, 1990, for review).

Although research suggests a general preference by men for attractive partners, attractiveness may be more important for some men than others. For example, a study by Touhey (1979) found that men who scored high in a measure of sex stereotyping were more eager to date a good-looking person and more apt to reject an unattractive individual than those low in sex stereotyping.

Why might sex stereotyping influence preference for an attractive partner? Lerner, Karabenick, and Stuart (1973) suggested that part of the male role is to desire attractive women. Highly sex stereotyped males are more likely to adhere to the traditional male role. Thus they may be more likely to prefer physically attractive dating partners than men who do not adhere to the traditional male role (men low in sex-stereotyping).

Since low sex stereotyped men are less concerned with appropriate sex roles, they may be less concerned with "appropriate" female characteristics such as attractiveness in a date. Touhey (1979) found that low sex stereotyped men placed more emphasis on biographical information and high sex stereotyped men placed more emphasis on physical attractiveness. Highly sex stereotyped males tended to see attractive women as "real women". Thus, it may be that highly

sex stereotyped men see physical attractiveness as part of the female role.

The first prediction is that the level of sex stereotyping will correlate with the level ratings of ideal physical attractiveness of dating partners. Thus, highly sex stereotyped males will rate their ideal dating partners as more attractive than will those men low in sex stereotyping.

Preference for Feminine Partners

Previous studies show that, in general, men's ideal dating partners tend to be more feminine than a typical woman (Nevid, 1984; Orlofsky, 1982). Orlofsky (1982) classified subjects according to sex-type and had them rate their ideal partner on the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Orlofsky found that, overall, men preferred feminine partners. Traditional men were especially likely to prefer feminine partners, while androgynous men preferred androgynous and feninine partners equally.

If a male believes in and follows traditional sex stereotyping, it seems likely that he would desire a partner who does the same. He may be reluctant to date a woman who does not adhere to the traditional female role. One traditional sex stereotype for women is that they should be feminine. The low sex stereotyped is less likely to adhere to conventional stereotypes. He may not believe that women should necessarily adhere to traditional women's roles, so he may be attracted to a wider variety of women; those who adhere to traditional sex stereotypes and those who do not.

The second prediction is that level of sex-stereotyping will positively correlate with level of ideal dating partner femininity ratings. Ideal dating partners of sex stereotyped participants will be rated higher on femininity than will ideal partners of low sex stereotyped males. Since feminine sex-typed individuals are high in feminine traits and low in masculine traits, the third prediction is that sex stereotyping will also correlate negatively wilth masculinity.

This study investigates the role of men's sex stereotypes about male and female roles on their dating preferences. It is hypothesized that more sex stereotypic men will prefer more physically attractive, and more femininine partners and less masculine partners.

METHOD

One hundred and one male undergraduate students from a large, Eastern university participated in a survey on "Dating Preferences of College Men" for Introductory to Psychology course credit .[1] Participants were asked to rate themselves on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972), and to rate their ideal dating partner on two physical attractiveness measures, and four masculinity and five femininity items from the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Femininity items included affectionate, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others, gentle, and likes children (slightly modified from the BSRI item "loves children"). Masculinity items were ambitious, assertive, independent, and makes decisions easily. Items were selected to represent a variety of traits within the masculinity and femininity constructs. Physical attractiveness items were physically attractive and pretty face.

Scales were created for ideal dating partner physical attractiveness, masculinity, and femininity. Alphas were .89 for physical attractiveness, .81 for femininity, and .55 for masculinity.

Numerous scales have been created to operationalize the concept of sex-stereotyping. One of the most widely used measures is the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). This scale examines the rights and roles of women in society. Sample items include "women should not be given the same freedoms as men" and "a woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage". The AWS was used as a measure of sex stereotyping to examine preferences for attractive and feminine partners. Individual participant scores were also created for the AWS. All items were positively scored. Thus, higher scores indicate less adherence to stereotypes. The alpha for the AWS was .89.

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[1]Although the survey did not specifically ask for heterosexual participants, it can be assumed that most participants were heterosexual men rating female partners

RESULTS

To test the first hypothesis, a correlation was done for AWS scores and ideal dating partner physical attractiveness scale ratings. The correlation was -.27 ($p< .01$), thus supporting the hypothesis that more stereotyped men (low scores on the AWS) would rate their ideal dating partners as higher in attractivenss than would low-stereotyped men (high AWS scores).

To test the second and third hypotheses, a correlation was performed for AWS scores and ideal dating partner femininity scores and masculinity scores. The correlation between participant AWS score and ideal dating partner femininity scale was .05, non-significant. The correlation between AWS scores and ideal dating partner masculinity was .26 ($p<.05$), indicating that highly sex stereotyped men were less likely to desire masculine partners than were low sex stereotyped men, as predicted.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study indicate highly sex stereotyped men are more likely to prefer physically attractive dating partners who are low in masculinity, but are no more likely to prefer feminine dating partners than are low sex stereotyped males.

One reason the second hypothesis may not have been wholey supported is that feminine items tend to be socially desirable (Eagly & Mlandinic, 1989), so both high and low sex stereotyped males may desire these characteristics in their dating partners. Also, it may be that highly sex stereotyped males prefer feminine-typed partners (high in femininity, low in masculinity) while low sex stereotyped men prefer androgynous partners. Orlofsky (1982) found that androgynous males preferred feminine and androgynous partners equally. Since androgynous persons do not adhere to traditional gender characteristics, rather using both masculine and feminine characteristics when appropriate (Bem, 1974), androgynous persons may be less sex stereotyped. Indeed, Anderson (1978) found that androgynous males were less sex stereotyped than masculine-typed men, indicating that highly sex stereotyped males may be more likely to adhere to the traditional male stereotype (to be masculine), while the low sex stereotyped man may be more androgynous. Thus it may be that highly sex stereotyped

(traditional) men desire traditional partners, while androgynous men desire androgynous partners.

Numerous studies have found a preference for physically attractive partners by males (see Feingold, 1990 for review). This study posits that this preference is moderated by sex stereotyping. Given this, if our society becomes less sex stereotyped, the emphasis on physical attractiveness in women should decrease, as should negative attitudes toward women possessing masculine traits. This may be a welcome relief for many women.

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